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AUTHOR Ohta, Amy Snyder
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ABSTRACT

A study investigated how pragmatic competence may develop in learner-learner interaction in a communication Japanese as a foreign language classroom, drawing on language socialization and sociocultural theory. A 100-minute second-year university-level Japanese language class at an urban state university was audio- and video-recorded, with a 30-minute session including a role play pair work activity transcribed for analysis. Analysis focused on the interactions of a student volunteer, whose progress in class meets teacher expectations, and another student whose progress is slower. Specific interactions, transcribed here, are discussed. It is concluded that the data show the sensitivity of classroom learners to different pragmatic requirements of classroom and second-language interactions being taught, and that the learners are able to adjust their language performance to construct the appropriate role for a particular context. Some students may not be able to produce correct usage, but are able to perform appropriately in certain pragmatic contexts with assistance. With time and appropriate assistance these students will eventually perform unaided. Contains 15 references. (MSE)

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The Development of Pragmatic Competence in Learner-Learner Interaction

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THE DEVELOPMENT OF PRAGMATIC COMPETENCE IN LEARNER-LEARNER INTERACTION

Presented at the Tenth Annual International Conference on Pragmatics and Language Learning, March 22-23, 1996, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL.

AMY SNYDER OHTA
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON
aohta@u.washington.edu

Asian Languages & Literature
Box 353521
Seattle, WA 98195

Introduction:

This paper considers how pragmatic competence may develop in learner-learner interaction in a communicative Japanese as a foreign language classroom. In examining the data, language socialization theory (Ochs & Schieffelin 1984) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1987, Wertsch 1985, Newman & Holzman 1993) are drawn upon to provide insight into the relationship between interaction and language development. Of particular interest in the data is the relationship between the development of pragmatic and grammatical competence. While the two cannot be clearly separated they clearly impact one another. Specifically, the data shows how a learner who has difficulty with grammatical form can apply pragmatic knowledge to his language performance and still develop in the area of pragmatic competence. The data also show how a learner with a high degree of facility and fluency with grammatical form may find it easier to develop patterns sociolinguistically appropriate language use. The data show how learners at different stages of grammatical competence are able to move towards pragmatic competence through interaction in as they use language creatively in contextualized communicative interaction.

Theoretical Framework:

This study draws upon principles of sociocultural theory (Vygotsky 1987, Wertsch 1985, Newman & Holzman 1993), which does not consider input and output to be discrete processes but sees the development of language and cognition as situated in social interaction (Ohta 1995a, 1996). Previous work on Japanese classroom discourse has examined the role of teacher language in the socialization of affect (Ohta 1993, 1994, 1995b, 1995c). The present paper examines learner interactive discourse, inquiring as to how language acquisition takes place through social interaction. The focus of analysis is the development of interactional competence including acquisition of knowledge of L2 pragmatics and interactional practices. Vygotskian sociohistorical theory also acknowledges that social interaction occurs on multiple levels--not only between individuals, but also on a societal level--on an institutional or historical level (Newman & Holzman 1993). How people interact is impacted not only by who the interlocutors are, but also by social institutional setting. Along with examining the development of pragmatic competence on an interpsychological level, analysis will examine how the socioinstitutional context of the foreign language classroom also impacts pragmatics.

Methodology:

A 100-minute second-year university-level Japanese class at an urban American state university was audio and video recorded, with a 30-minute session including a role play pair work activity transcribed for analysis. The video camera was positioned to record learner interaction and activity, with microphones for audio recording located at the video camera at the front of the classroom and clipped to Becky, a student volunteer. Clipping a microphone to Becky enabled collection of interaction during pair work. The class

consisted of a heterogeneous group (Table 1) of seven students (2 female and 5 male) who were in the 2nd year class either because they had successfully completed previous courses, or because previous non-academic background in the language was insufficient for them to be placed at a higher level because lacked literacy skills. Except for its small size, this class was ordinary as compared to other Japanese classes at this particular university, which is one of the most ethnically diverse in the nation..

Table 1: The Students

NAME	AGE	HOME LANGUAGES	GREW UP IN: (COUNTRY)	EDUCATED IN:	UNIVERSITY-LEVEL JAPANESE
Becky	20	Tagalog & English	U.S.	English	1st & 2nd[1] year
Rita	18	Amharic & English	Ethiopia, Japan, U.S.	English	placed in 2nd year
Ken	17	English	U.S.	English, Japanese (pre-school only)	placed in 2nd year
Joe	22	English & Japanese	U.S.	English	1st & 2nd year
Hal	33	Chinese	Taiwan	Chinese	1st & 2nd year in 1980's. Repeating 2nd year (as a grad student)
Mark	27	Chinese	Taiwan	Chinese	1st year (completed 2 years earlier, jr. college). 2nd year.
Sam	20	Vietnamese & English	Vietnam, U.S.	English	1st & 2nd year

Analysis of the data focuses upon Becky (age 20) and Mark (age 27), Becky's partner for the role play activity. The particular pairing of Becky and Mark provided the opportunity to examine learner-learner interaction in an asymmetrical pairing of a learner with weaker language skills (Mark) with a learner of higher L2 proficiency (Becky). Observations of Becky and Mark's classes as well as interviews in Japanese between both learners and the researcher[2] reveal that these two learners are very different in terms of what they can do with Japanese. While Becky actively experiments with Japanese and is able to express herself in the L2 at a level that might be expected from a second year student, Mark's progress is slower. Having taken a year off between first and second year Japanese, Mark struggles not only to put together sentences, but even to recall basic lexical items. Becky expresses herself with fluency, while Mark struggles with words.

In this particular class session, the teacher modeled one way to make a polite request to a person of higher social rank, with students asked to perform simple (two turn) role plays using the target request structure after practicing in teacher-fronted practice and hearing a brief grammar explanation in English.

Analysis:

During the teacher-fronted portion of the class, after producing model requests and giving a brief grammar lecture, the teacher asks various students to form polite requests. In excerpt 1, Mark produces a request for chocolate, prompted by the teacher and Hal, a classmate.

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[1]On this chart ' 2nd year' means that the students are currently enrolled in the third quarter of 2nd year.
[2]Interviews in Japanese, observation of their class, and the experience of the researcher teaching Becky and Mark in previous courses show Becky to more proficient in Japanese than Mark.

1)

1 T: John-san, Mark-san, nani ka arimasu ka?
John, Mark, do you have anything ((you'd like to have))?

2 M: Arimasu ka, arimasu ka? Chotto (.) ((scratching head))
Is there anything, is there anything? I'm not sure (.) ((scratching head))

3 T: Nani ka kangaete kudasai.
Please think of something.

8[3] H: Tokei? Tokei?
A watch? A watch?

9 T: Tokei?
A watch?

10 M: Chocolate.

11 T: Chokoreeto?
Chocolate?

12 H: Chokoreeto. Chokoreeto o
Chocolate. Chocolate ((topic marker))

--> 13 M: Chokoreeto o ssss um o (.) okuri?// okuri?// okutte?//
Chocolate ssss um (.) send? send? send?[4]

14 T: un. un. un.
uh huh. uh huh. uh huh.

--> 15 M: okutte itadakitai n desu ga.
Would you send me? [5]

16 T: Ii desu yo. Wakarimashita. A^ Mark-san, chokoreeto ga suki desu ka?
Sure. I understand. Oh^ Mark, you like chocolate?

17 M: Hai, suki desu.
Yes, I do.

Mark, with prompting from Hal and encouragement (line 14) from the teacher, successfully forms the request targeted. Becky, nominated by the teacher next, works to avoid making a request.

2)

1 T: Becky-san, nani ga ii desu ka?
So Becky, what would you like?

---

[3]Lines 4-7 omitted. Complete excerpt available in Ohta (1995a).

[4]Mark does not repeat the same grammatical form 'send' three times, but changes the form from 'okuri' to 'okutte.' 'Okutte' is the correct form for this particular context.

[5]The object 'chocolate' is not ellipted, but is stated in line 13 followed by the accusative marker 'o.' English glosses do not accurately capture the Japanese Mark is using, which is constructed correctly: "*Chokoreeto o okutte itadakitai n desu ga* " means "I request that you send me some chocolate".

2 B: Nandemo ii desu.
Anything is okay.

3 T: ((laughing)) Nandemo ii? Onegai shite kudasai ne::. Hai.
((laughing)) Anything? Make a request please::. Okay.

From the point of view of pragmatic competence in Japanese, Becky's response is quite appropriate. When asked one's preferences, preferred response Japanese is to avoid saying a preference--to say that anything would be fine[6]. However, in this particular language class the preferred response is quite different--students are supposed to produce target structures being taught. After accepting Becky's response, the teacher states that Becky should make a request. Here we see conflicting pragmatic systems at work--the system of a language class, where students are to produce structures being taught, and the system of the target culture, in which statement of one's preferences is dispreferred. While Becky's response may be a result of her awareness of target society norms, another possibility is that she is being responsive to quite another set of pragmatic realities--those of American classrooms, where students may avoid being put on the spot by giving a 'one size fits all' sort of response. This avoidance may be caused by lack of ability--maybe she isn't confident to produce the request. However, students who avoid giving an answer aren't necessarily unprepared or unable. These sorts of responses are common in American classrooms, including the ubiquitous, "I don't know." *Why* Becky produces this response is not recoverable from examination of the discourse.

It quickly becomes clear, however, that Becky does not say *nandemo ii* because of any inability to produce the target request. Once Mark and Becky get started with pair practice, Becky easily produces the target request, and Mark appropriately responds:

3) 1 M: Suwatte kudasai.
Please sit down.

2 B: Hai. ((E adjusts chair)). Okay. ((looks at cameraman, laughs)) My cameraman!
Okay. ((E adjusts chair)). Okay. ((looks at cameraman, laughs)) My cameraman!

3 M: Doozo.
Go ahead.

4 B: Ano::.
Um::.

5 M: (.) Hajimete.
(.) Start.

6 B: Hai. Seito. Watash- ano:
Okay. Student. I- uh:

---

[6]Also, Becky is from a Tagalog-speaking family. The pragmatic norms of stating preferences in Tagalog are not known by the researcher. It is possible that Becky's heritage language background plays a role here.

7 M: Anata (wa seito desu)
You (are the student)

--> 8 B: Atarashii kuruma o kashite itadakitai desu ga. ((laughs))
I would like you to lend me a new car. ((laughs))

9 M: Ashita?
Tomorrow? ((note, similarity of sou[illegible]e words 'atarashii' [new] and 'ashita' [tomorrow]

--> 10 B: Atarashii kuruma o: katte itadaki-itadakitai n desu ga,
I wou- would like you to buy me a new car.

11 M: Aa! Atara- atarashi-
Oh! N- new-

12 B: ((To teacher)) Kashite? Kashite de ii?
Lend? Is 'lend' okay?

13 T: Katte.
Buy.

14 B: Katte? Katte itadakitai n desu ga,
Buy? I'd like you to buy.

15 M: Atara- atarashii?
N- new?

16 B: Atarashii ku//ruma o katte itadakitai n desu ga,
I'd like you to buy me a new car.

17 M: Aa soo desu ka. Aa, sore wa chotto.
Oh, is that right. Well, that's a little . . .

A variety of interactional strategies are used by Becky and Mark in this excerpt. Collaborative activities are common in their classroom and they have had extensive practice and support in using Japanese to handle these activities. They have no difficulty managing their pair work while using exclusively Japanese for getting set up, negotiating roles, handling repair, and dealing with lexical choice issues[7].

When it is Mark's turn to make a request, he performs more tentatively, with help from Becky.

4) 1 B: Doozo
Go ahead.

2 M: Um. Um:::. Mmm:: Ah! (.) ((laughs))

[7]See Ohta (1995) for a detailed discussion of these and other aspects of Mark and Becky's language use.

3 B: Hai do::::zooo:! Hayaku!
Okay, go ahead ple::ase! Hurry!

4 M: Seko. Seko no. Seko no:: Seko no tokei ga:: (.) a::h um.
Seiko. A seiko. A seiko:: a seiko watch:: (.) a::h um.

--> 5 B: Ka::

6 M: Katte? itadakitai n desu ga?
Buy? I'd like you to buy?

7 B: Ha soo. Ii desu yo::.
Oh. Sure, that's fine::.

Prompted by Becky in line 5, Mark tentatively produces the target request in line 6. This is the only time, however, that he produces the correct form of *itadakitai* without assistance. After this pass through the role play, he consistently has trouble in producing the target form, as shown in this next excerpt.

5) 1 M: Aisu Sukating?
Ice Skating?

2 B: Ice. Oh hai?
Ice. Oh uh-huh?

--> 3 M: Hai. (.) naoshite? (.) itadai n desu ga.
Yes. (.) repair? (.) would you repair?

--> 4 B: Moichido kudasai.
Again please?

5 M: Moichido kudasai?
Again please?

6 B: Watashi ((Cups hand behind ear)) (.) ano: (.) (yoku wakarimasen).
I don't understand well

--> 7 M: Aisu skating. Aisu suke- Aisu sukeeto//=[8]
Ice skating. Ice ska- Ice skate//=

8 B: //aisu sukeeto
//aisu sukeeto

9 M: =aisu sukeeto ga (.) um (.) um (.) oshiete? itada- itadai n desu.//
=ice-skating (.) uh (.) uh (.) I would like to receive your teaching?

--> 10 B: //itadakitai n desu.
//I would like to receive.

---

[8]The equal sign (=) is used to indicate that the speaker continues the turn without pause

--> 11 M: A^ itadakitai n desu ga?
Oh. I would like to receive?

12 B: Hai. So. Ii desu yo. Wakarimashita.
Yes. Right. Sure. I understand.

After Mark has difficulty in pronouncing *itadakitai* correctly, Becky provides him with the verb in line 10, and in line 11 Mark pronounces it correctly. Here, Becky is responsive to two different sets of pragmatic realities, and is able to perform two different roles to fulfill both sets of norms. She acts as herself, the more proficient student and language 'expert' who assists Mark, the novice, to produce the language; at the same time she also plays her role in the role play. She constructs these two roles through language--language to help and prompt (in line 10 of this excerpt and line 7 of the previous excerpt), as well as the language of the role play. This construction of the two roles is even more striking in the language Becky uses to respond to Mark's requests. Mark's line 11 response to Becky's prompt serves two functions. First, it is part of Mark's formulation of the target request. Mark's line 11 utterance is also second pair part to Becky's line 10 assistance--she provides Mark with the verb phrase, and he repeats it with rising intonation. In line 12 Becky responds to Mark's utterance from both perspectives. Before responding to Mark's role-play request, Becky first moves out of the role play to handle the language issue, indicating that Mark has conjugated the verb correctly, by saying "Hai. So." This is a typical 'evaluation' turn, used by teachers in response to learner utterances (Mehan 1985, Sinclair & Coulthard 1975, Ohta 1993, 1994). Becky, however, is acting as a surrogate teacher here, taking the expert role in helping Mark with his language production. She does not remain in this role, however. Immediately after providing the 'evaluation,' she moves immediately to play her part in the role play, and agrees to Mark's request. Becky's language use reveals the unique situation of the classroom with relation to developing pragmatic competence--the pragmatics of the classroom and the pragmatics of L2 nonpedagogical interactional style clearly coexist in the students' discourse. One might question, however, whether Becky knows the difference and can respond appropriately in a nonpedagogical context.

The data reveal that Becky does, in fact, know the difference. Later we see Mark and Becky performing their role play in a different context--in front of the class, with the teacher standing by and observing. In excerpt 6 below, this difference in context is clearly reflected in Mark and Becky's language use. Again, we see the impact of the socioinstitutional setting of the classroom. In front of the teacher, the historical 'expert.' Becky sticks to her role play role, doing neither prompting nor evaluations.

6) --> 1 M: Hai. Becky-sensei. (.) Um (.) aisu sukeeto um::. Um. Aisu-sukeeto ga (.) oshiete itadain desu ka?
Yes, Becky. Um, ice-skating, um::. Um. will you teach me ice-skating?

2 B: Hai. ii desu yo. Wakarimashita.
Yes. That's fine. I understand.

3 M: Hai doomo arigatoo gozaimashita.
Thank you very much.

4 B: Hai doo itashimashite.
You're welcome.

--> 5 T: Sukeeto o oshiete itadaikitai. Aisu sukeeto o::,
Would you teach me. Ice-skating::,

6 M: Aisu sukeeto o,
Ice skating:::,

7 T: Oshiete itadakitai n desu ga
Would you teach me.

While negotiation of roles and meanings are features of the pair work data, such negotiation is absent here. Although Mark repeats his error, Becky does not correct, prompt, or assist him as she did during collaborative work earlier, but remains silent. After completion of the role play, the teacher prompts Mark to produce a corrected utterance. Becky does not produce any evaluation of Mark's performance in the presence of the teacher (the socioinstitutionally designated 'evaluator'). Becky appropriately applies her knowledge of pragmatics to the situation. Mark and Becky's language performance changes in other ways as well--when not performing in front of the teacher their talk included follow-questions, talk about related issues, word-searches, creative expansion of the role play, and co-constructed utterances, all of which are absent from the performance above.

Development of grammatical and pragmatic competence in the ZPD

While the target structure 'Vte itadakitai n desu ga' presents no problem for Becky, it is problematic for Mark. Immediately after the teacher-fronted demonstration, Mark uses the structure without error on his first attempt with reference to the blackboard. However, repeated opportunities to practice result in the emergence of errors, even though he has the opportunity to hear Becky use the form correctly thirteen times during her turns at being the 'student' in the role play. And, even though both Becky and the teacher provide explicit correction, Mark goes back to making the same error both during collaborative practice and in performance following pair work. Of the three times he conjugates the verb 'itadaku' correctly, one is with the assistance of the blackboard, one with the assistance of Becky. He only conjugates 'itadaku' correctly once without such assistance or support.

This difference in performance between Becky and Mark raises questions about the nature of L2 development. Some looking at this data might say that this activity has failed Mark, or that Mark himself has failed, ignoring what Mark does well (for example, accepting and declining requests), and failing to consider the nature of language development. When using language in meaningful context, acquirers of language are undergoing a process of developing indexical connections between language form and social context (Ochs 1990). Language acquirers and other novices develop over time via both active and peripheral participation in activity with experts, whether native speakers or more proficient peers. Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development, explains how development proceeds through learner performance of tasks *with assistance* that they are not able to perform without assistance. This is the situation in which we see Mark--with assistance, he is able to perform the task correctly. Without assistance, while he is able to do some aspects of the task, he is as yet unable to perform competently. Development proceeds as the learner, over time, requires less and less assistance to complete an activity, and finally incorporates the activity into his or her repertoire of what he or she can do unaided. Mark is on his way--he can do the task partially without assistance, and shows understanding of the pragmatics of the request as well as those of agreement and refusal of favors. He needs assistance, however, to form requests himself. According to Vygotsky, this is the context in which human development takes place.

Conclusion:

These data clearly show the sensitivity of classroom learners to different pragmatic requirements of the classroom and L2 interactions being taught. Rather than showing classroom pragmatics to disrupt the acquisition of L2 pragmatics, we see evidence that learners are aware of different pragmatic norms and are able to adjust their language performance to construct the appropriate role for a particular context. While these data are indicative of the language development of two learners over a brief period of time, they provide a view of classroom L2 acquisition in process as it occurs in learner-learner collaborative interaction. Analysis reveals that even foreign language beginners may be adept and distinguishing language appropriate for different contexts, evidenced by Becky's adept use of Japanese to constitute two different roles for herself, and her ability to move in and out of the 'expert' role in the absence or presence of the teacher. Mark reveals his sensitivity to context as well, sticking to the role play in the teacher's presence, while using language more flexibly and creatively when working with Becky during pair work. There are a couple of ways to look at Mark's performance. One is that he is reinforcing incorrect usage. Such an assertion, however, misses the essence of language development in the zone of proximal development. Mark is able to produce the target request, and even conjugate the verb successfully with assistance. In addition, he successfully plays the teacher role while Becky makes polite requests. This legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger 1989) in requests serves an important function skill development. Vygotsky's work on the zone of proximal development reveals that while Mark is unable to perform the activity alone, a true measure of development is examining what the learner can do with assistance. What Mark now can do only with assistance, with time and appropriate assistance he will eventually be able to do unaided. Focus on learner errors, therefore, obscures language development that is taking place. Further studies of learner-learner interaction are needed to better understand how learners are able to develop the ability to apply their emerging knowledge of L2 pragmatics in different situations as well as to further illuminate the nature of language development in the ZPD.

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